



**Bald Head Woods Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, November 10, 2016 – 10 am  
Bald Head Island Conservancy Auditorium**

**Attendance**

<b><u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u></b>	<b><u>Present</u></b>
Bald Head Island Conservancy – Chris Shank, Brooke Milligan	Yes
Village of Bald Head Island – Jeff Griffin	Yes
Village of Bald Head Island Public Safety	No
<b><u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u></b>	
Al Buzzard	No
Gene Douglas	No (resigned)
Dr. Anthony Snider	No (resigned)
Dr. Robert Timmons	No (resigned)
<b><u>Others Present</u></b>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager	
Marie Davis, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Education Specialist	

**Reserve-wide Administrative Update**

- *Staffing News*
  - Elise Gilchrist joined the Reserve team in August as our Communications and Project Management Specialist. Elise has a Bachelor's degree in Animal Behavior. Shortly after graduating, she moved to Thailand and spent two years working as a research assistant for a non-profit organization that studies Asian elephant cognition and promotes wildlife conservation. It was through this experience that she recognized her passion for science communication. She then held a position at a marine conservation field station in Mexico working as a media and communications specialist.

- Kate (Murray) Jones joined the Reserve in October as our Northern Sites Manager. Kate has a Bachelor's degree in Biology with a minor in Environmental Studies from the College of Charleston and a professional degree in Landscape Architecture from The University of British Columbia. She most recently worked with The Nature Conservancy in natural area management of the Nags Head Woods Preserve and served as the GIS analyst and community engagement coordinator for the NC Coastal Resilience project. Additionally, Kate has landscape design and planning experience in residential and municipal settings and currently serves on the Town of Nags Head's Planning Board.
- *NCNERR Management Plan Update*  
Staff are continuing to work on the management plan update for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve. NOAA is reviewing initial draft chapters of the plan as they are completed to ensure that all required elements are included per the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) management plan guidelines; approximately half of the chapters have been reviewed or are under review currently. The Reserve will then seek input on the full initial draft plan from the LACs, N.C. Coastal Resources Commission (CRC), and the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality. NOAA will then review the final draft management plan for content and compliance with the NERRS management plan guidelines. A 30-day public comment period and three public meetings will be held on the final draft management plan prior to the plan's final publication. Staff are planning to review the full initial draft plan with the LACs at their spring 2017 meetings and share the plan and LAC comments on the plan with the CRC at their April 2017 meeting.
- *Budget*
  - The Division of Coastal Management received \$619,322 from NOAA for operation of the NCNERR portion of the Coastal Reserve during this fiscal year, up \$24,872 from last year. The additional funds are being used to cover fixed cost increases and to fund a portion of the temporary staffing positions through the annual budget rather than relying on a variety of different funding sources that vary from year to year.
  - The Division of Coastal Management's state appropriations were reduced by \$27,173 this fiscal year as required by the Department of Environmental Quality. As a result, the appropriations allocated for the Reserve program were reduced by approximately \$5,000.
- *Periodic Rules Review*  
The Coastal Reserve's rules, 07O, are scheduled to be reviewed by the Rules Review Commission in June 2017 as part of the Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A). Staff classified each rule citation in 07O as necessary with substantive public interest, necessary without substantive public interest, or unnecessary per G.S. 150B-21.3A (c)(1). Staff then revised the initial draft classification based on input from the LACs and the CRC supported the revised initial draft classification at its July 2016 meeting. The Department of Environmental Quality approved revised initial draft classification and the classification is currently out for public comment through November

21, 2016. As of October 21, 2016, the approximate mid-point of the public comment period, no comments had been received. After the public comment period closes, staff will compile a report for submittal to the Rules Review Commission that responds to comments received and amends the initial agency determinations if necessary. The LACs will have the opportunity to review the draft report in January 2017 prior to presentation of the report to the CRC at its February 2017 meeting. Any proposed amendments to the rule language received during the public comment period will be considered during the readoption process.

- *Shellfish lease policy*

The Reserve has been working on an internal policy related to management of shellfish aquaculture leases. As a result of two new leases at the Masonboro Island site and a growing interest in this industry statewide, in November of 2015, Reserve staff recommended to DMF that no further leases be considered within Reserve boundaries through December 2016. This temporary suspension was enacted to give the Reserve time to consider and evaluate how this activity and siting of leases within the boundaries interacts with the various management designations, programs, rules, and policies that affect the Reserve sites. Concerns the Reserve staff brought forth about this activity include: the unknown ecological impacts of leases, particularly the cumulative impact of multiple leases; how these impacts may jeopardize the Reserve sites' ability to serve as "control" research and monitoring sites; the ability of other traditional users to effectively utilize the sites; and the possible impact to the recreational visitor experience. Reserve staff have since been working to develop an internal policy to describe how shellfish lease requests will be evaluated, to outline how the Reserve will work with DMF to site leases to reduce conflicts with other uses and with ecologically sensitive resources, and to determine what thresholds may be appropriate to ensure that the natural, ambient conditions of the sites are not altered and that the research and long-term monitoring missions of the Reserve are not compromised. We currently anticipate having a final policy completed before the end of the temporary suspension at which time we will begin to review any new proposed leases on a case-by-case basis. As part of the development of the policy, the Reserve may reach out to the Local Advisory Committees for input.

### **Site Update/Old Business**

- *Site conditions/storm report*

As a result of several storms, including Hurricane Matthew, the hiking trails are in need of some attention. The Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager assessed trail condition following the hurricane. Bald Head Island Conservancy (BHIC) staff visited the site and completed a first round of maintenance. Although most trails are passable, downed trees and branches still need to be cleared to ensure easy and safe access for visitors. The Nature Conservancy has expressed willingness to send chain saw qualified staff members to help with the more challenging areas, but a date for this work has not been established. The loop trail is least accessible and has been closed to visitors in the interim.

- *Wellfield update*

Four new production wells were installed in the wellfield parcel near the western boundary of the Reserve during August. These wells will be online and productive before the high visitor season of 2017. The Village, the Reserve, Conservancy staff, and a number of experts on hydrogeology and wetlands ecology, working together as the Monitoring Advisory Group, continue to conduct monitoring activities and assess data to ensure that water withdrawals do not compromise the ecological integrity of the site or damage globally rare communities present at the site. The first data assessment indicated that no observable effects occurred in the surficial aquifer during well tests or during the initial data collection period. The water level probes being utilized in the monitoring wells have proven to be problematic and inaccurate. The advisory group has recommended some modifications to the monitoring plan to adjust activities accordingly. Changes will include utilizing a pressure transducer type of water level probe in monitoring wells associated with the highly sensitive swale marshes and switching to monthly manual water level readings in other monitoring wells. The advisory group is working to draft a monitoring plan amendment for approval and implementation prior to summer 2017.

### **New Business**

- *Loop trail rerouting*

The installation of the new production wells, which are accessed via 20' wide cleared areas through the forest vegetation, has changed the aesthetic experience along the trail.

Discussion occurred about whether the loop trail should be abandoned or whether it could be rerouted to provide a better visitor experience. The Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager suggested that it may be possible to recruit UNCW students to help design and implement a new trail route to still offer a loop trail but alter the western portion of the loop. BHIC interns may be able to assist with installation during the spring.

### **Roundtable Discussion**

- Ms. Milligan reported that the BHIC is preparing to conduct deer immunocontraceptive work again during the winter. Wildlife Resources Commission staff have been working closely with BHIC staff to prepare for this operation. Darting will be conducted in January and February with three of the bait stations to be located within the Reserve boundary. Ms. Milligan also reported on the BHIC's wildlife camera based population survey being conducted prior to the darting operation. She stated that the research permit for this work would be submitted within the next week.
- Discussion occurred regarding the deer exclusion areas within the forest. The prevailing opinion was that these areas should continue to be maintained in order to provide long-term data to support understanding of deer browsing but also for capturing forest growth and change in vegetation communities. Reserve staff and BHIC staff will plan to revisit these exclosures in the near future to assess the condition of the infrastructure.

### **Public Comments**

- None

### **Action Items**

- The Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager will contact Bald Head Island Conservancy staff in the coming weeks to schedule a trail maintenance and loop trail assessment day. The Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager will also contact The Nature Conservancy and UNCW to recruit support for these activities.
- The Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager will work with Bald Head Island Conservancy staff during the winter season to assess the forest exclosures and plan for any maintenance or repairs that are required.
- The Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager will contact committee members early in 2017 to establish dates for 2017 meetings.